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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

17 May 1951

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT:

[REDACTED]

"An Analysis of Internal and External Factors pertaining to the Soviet Union making for a policy of restraint and of those favoring aggression."

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1. This paper, though containing much of substantial interest and value, ends with an optimistic conclusion which we believe is misleading. Neither the scope of the study nor the evidence presented can justify the statement that "overt Soviet aggression involving a risk of all-out war is not likely for several years at least." The question of the likelihood of all-out war must be considered in the entire broad context of world events. It cannot be settled within the narrower framework of this study.

2. It is indeed possible that the Kremlin will try to avoid any single calculated act of aggression which would be certain to start global war. But global war, if it occurs, may well be the end product of a series of measures of local Soviet aggressiveness, no one of them intended to carry grave risk of general conflict, but each demanding an increased Soviet commitment and each leading to counter-measures by the Western powers, which in their turn call forth answering counter-measures by the USSR. At the culmination of such a chain of events, either the USSR or the US might well face a choice between initiating general war, with all its dangers and uncertainty of outcome, and accepting peace under terms calling for the sacrifice of major national interests. At such a moment it might be virtually beyond the power of either side to avert war.

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3. We believe, moreover, that even within its stated context this paper overestimates the effect of many factors in deterring the USSR from acts of aggression, and undervalues the effect of those that tend to encourage aggression. Some factors may also operate either as stimuli or as deterrents, and we cannot confidently predict the direction in which any one of them may actually influence Soviet policy. For example, the paper indicates that Soviet morale is low, and that there may be dissension and difficulties within the regime. Such a state of affairs might well cause concern to the Kremlin, but whether it would constitute an important deterrent to aggression is another matter. The Soviet police system is, on the whole, capable of controlling the population, and there seems small likelihood that resistance groups capable of hindering the prosecution of the war would arise, at least during the earlier stages of the conflict.

4. Again, the paper admits that the Kremlin may decide that if its expansionist aims are to be achieved, or potential Western threats to USSR security overcome, it must strike before the growing strength of the West makes conquest impossible or offers a serious threat to the USSR. The conclusion is nevertheless reached that a deliberate provocation of war on such grounds would seem to the Kremlin "premature and foolhardy." We cannot so easily write off the chance that Soviet aggression may arise from such factors; we believe that this possibility cannot be disregarded.

5. The foregoing examples illustrate defects in the paper's balancing of factors that deter against those that stimulate Soviet aggression. Despite these criticisms, however, we believe the study, within its own proper and limited scope, is of real value. Its contribution on the subject of Soviet popular morale is noteworthy. It was not intended, and it should not be regarded, as a comprehensive and conclusive estimate of Soviet intentions.

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